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INITIATIVE IN THE OPERATIONAL DEFENSE--IS IT POSSIBLE?

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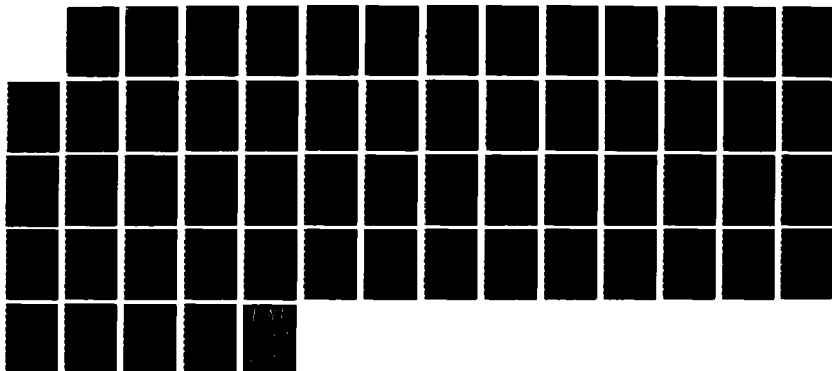
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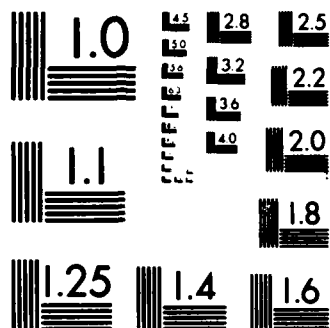
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Initiative in the Operational
Defense--Is it Possible?

by
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<p>This monograph investigates the possible use of initiative by the operational commander when conducting a defense. AirLand Battle doctrine is based on securing or retaining the initiative and exercising it aggressively to accomplish the mission, however, present US doctrine treats initiative as an attribute of the offensive. Can the operational commander exhibit the tenet of initiative while in the defense, and if so, what aspects of initiative are possible?</p> <p>This monograph first examines the theory of initiative and defense to establish clearly both concepts. Subsequently, two campaigns are examined to provide insights concerning the question of initiative in the operational defense. Specially, Wellington's defensive campaign in Portugal against the French in 1810 and Slim's defensive campaign against the Japanese at Imphal-Kohima in 1944. The monograph concludes with a discussion of the conclusions drawn from the campaign analysis.</p> <p>The study concludes that the operational commander can display initiative while in the defense, although admittedly to a lesser extent than while in the offense. (continued on back)</p>						
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(block 19 continued) Therefore, the tenet of initiative is as applicable to the defense as it is to the offense in AirLand Battle, yet it may manifest itself differently in each case. The use of the counterattack, which AirLand Battle doctrine stresses, is not the only way to exhibit initiative when in the defense. Because the terms of battle can sometimes be dictated when defending the operational commander should give credence to the possible use of the operational defense to set the terms of battle and grasp the initiative from the enemy.

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Abstract

INITIATIVE IN THE OPERATIONAL DEFENSE--IS IT POSSIBLE? by Maj Kenneth J. Quinlan, USA, 46 pages.

This monograph investigates the possible use of initiative by the operational commander when conducting a defense. AirLand Battle doctrine is based on securing or retaining the initiative and exercising it aggressively to accomplish the mission, however, present U.S. doctrine treats initiative as an attribute of the offensive. Can the operational commander exhibit the tenet of initiative while in the defense, and if so, what aspects of initiative are possible?

This monograph first examines the theory of initiative and defense to establish clearly both concepts. Subsequently, two campaigns are examined to provide insights concerning the question of initiative in the operational defense. Specifically, Wellington's defensive campaign in Portugal against the French in 1810 and Slim's defensive campaign against the Japanese at Imphal-Kohima in 1944. The monograph concludes with a discussion of the conclusions drawn from the campaign analysis.

The study concludes that the operational commander can display initiative while in the defense, although admittedly to a lesser extent than while in the offense. Therefore, the tenet of initiative is as applicable to the defense as it is to the offense in AirLand Battle, yet it may manifest itself differently in each case. The use of the counterattack, which AirLand Battle doctrine stresses, is not the only way to exhibit initiative when in the defense. Because the terms of battle can sometimes be dictated when defending the operational commander should give credence to the possible use of the operational defense to set the terms of battle and grasp the initiative from the enemy.

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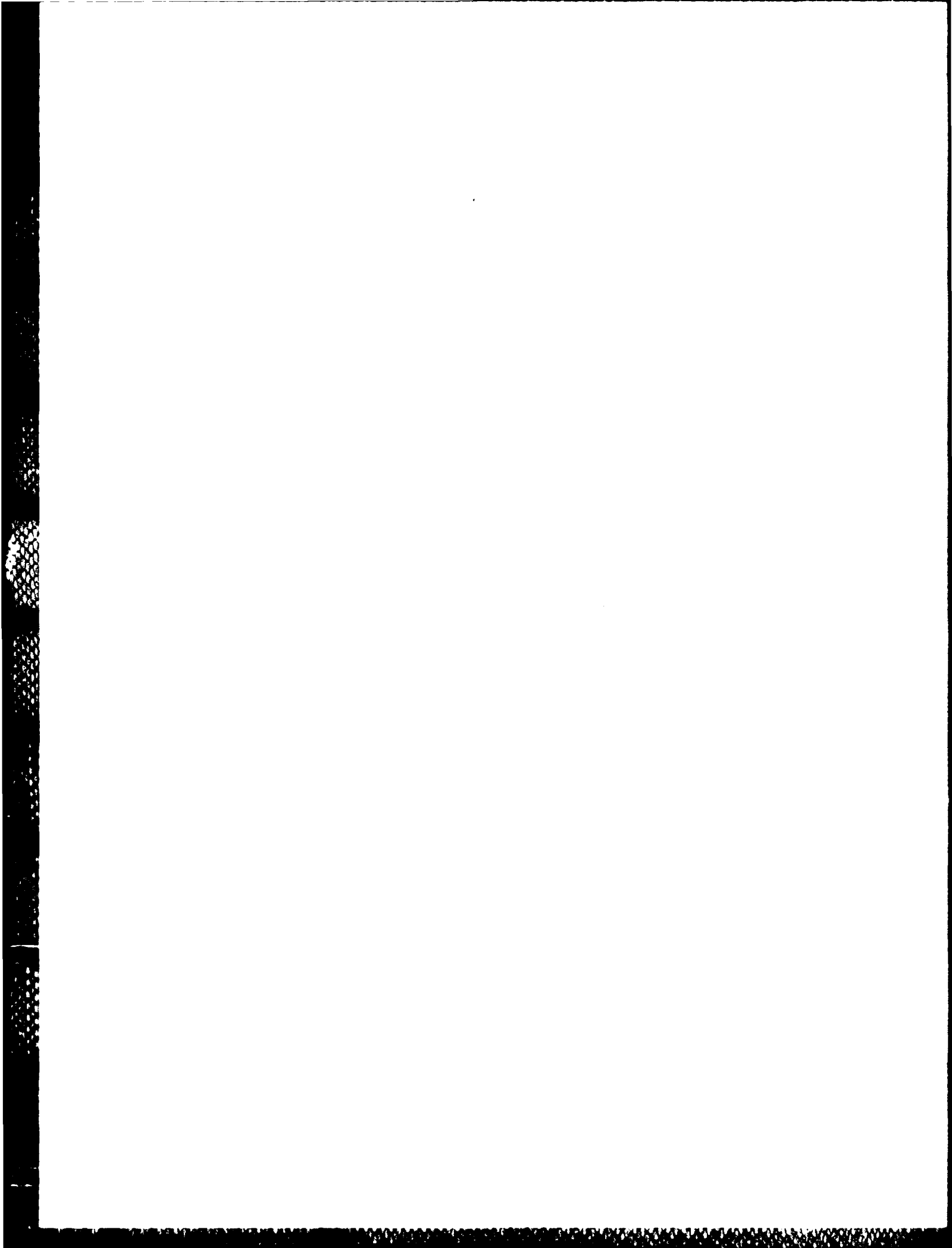
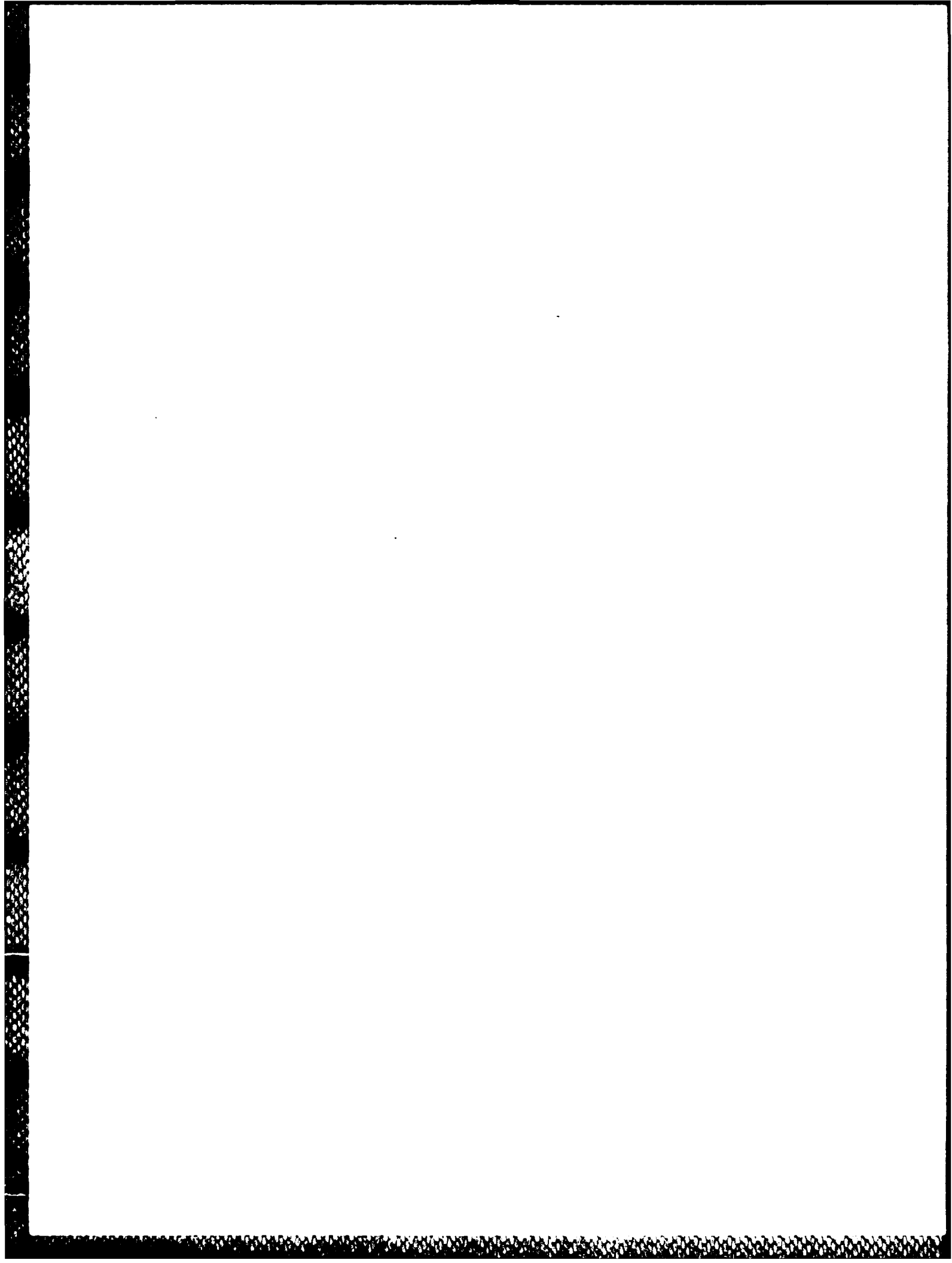


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Introduction

The Offensive Spirit

AirLand Battle has given new life to the spirit of the offense in U.S. warfighting doctrine. AirLand Battle doctrine "is based on securing or retaining the initiative and exercising it aggressively to accomplish the mission." (1) The doctrine espouses a warfighting philosophy built on four basic tenets; agility, initiative, depth, and synchronization. One of these tenets, initiative, is a central theme throughout the doctrine. It is predominantly this tenet which lends such emphasis to the offense in AirLand Battle doctrine.

The Problem

A study of FM 100-5 reveals three shortcomings in the use of the tenet initiative. First, the majority of the text treats initiative as an attribute of the offensive. Second, there is an overemphasis on the counterattack as the only means of exercising initiative in the defense. Finally, while there is general understanding of the tenet of initiative as forcing the enemy to conform to our operational purpose and tempo by setting the terms of battle, there is no consensus on how this translates into action on the battlefield. (2)

If the tenet of initiative is to have utility in U.S. doctrine then it must have applicability for both the offense and the defense. Currently this is not the case. Instead "...the manual unnecessarily circumscribes the exercise of initiative in the operational level defense. It concedes the operational initiative to the attacker...." (3) This raises a dilemma for the

operational commander when he is in the defense. How does he display initiative while on the defense; is his only means the counterattack or do other ways exist?

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this paper is to determine if it is possible to exercise initiative when conducting an operational defense. If the exercise of initiative is possible, then what are the specific aspects of initiative and under what conditions can the operational commander retain them? The steps to accomplish this task will begin with an examination of the theory of initiative and defense to establish clearly both concepts. Subsequently, two campaigns will be examined to provide insights concerning the question of initiative in the operational defense. Wellington's defensive campaign in Portugal against the French in 1810 and Slim's defensive campaign against the Japanese at Imphal-Kohima in 1944 will be examined. With this accomplished insights and lessons will be drawn from both campaigns to help establish the role of initiative in the operational defense.

Concept of Initiative

FM 100-5 recognizes two categories of initiative. "Applied to individual soldiers and leaders, it requires a willingness and ability to act independently within the framework of the higher commanders intent." (4) Simply stated, this is individual initiative. Applied to the force as a whole, initiative requires a constant effort to force the enemy to conform to our operational purpose and tempo while maintaining our own freedom of action." (5) It is this latter category of initiative which this monograph will explore.

Initiative--a way or an end?

The AirLand Battle tenet, initiative, has proven to be difficult to conceptualize. As stated in FM 100-5, "Initiative means setting or changing the terms of battle by action." (6) But FM 100-5 does not specially define what the terms of battle are. Nor is the manual consistent in its use of the term "initiative". In fact, unlike the other tenets, initiative is portrayed largely as an end rather than a way.

The four tenets of AirLand Battle provide general guidelines for the conduct of operations. In other words, they deal with the ways of fighting. However, in describing the mechanism with which the operational defender seizes the initiative, the manual appears to be portraying it as an end, the military condition to be achieved as the result of a series of coordinated tactical actions. Consequently, this view of initiative as a condition to be achieved is incompatible with its use as a tenet of AirLand Battle. (7)

The measure of effectiveness of a principle or tenet is the "extent to which it facilitates and illuminates the decision making process." (8) The tenets of AirLand Battle doctrine must help elucidate the way US forces should

fight, not describe an end state to be achieved. Agility, depth and synchronization all prescribe a way or manner to conduct AirLand Battle, not an end to be achieved. FM 100-5 does not talk about the agility, the depth, and the synchronization. However, the treatment of initiative throughout FM 100-5 refers to the initiative repeatedly, implying a thing to be achieved rather than a way to conduct the fight.

Initiative in its literal sense means essentially acting first or displaying aggressiveness. The phrase "take or gain the initiative" is common usage within our Army today and causes no misunderstanding among soldiers. However, as a tenet of AirLand Battle, initiative as it applies to the force it requires a broader application than what common usage now says it has in the Army. The present description of initiative in FM 100-5 speaks of setting terms of battle while retaining freedom of action. (9) This description provides a measure of the needed direction for a broader concept. The use of initiative also appears to be too absolute--you either have the initiative or you don't. (10) In reality initiative is a continuum, where the relative balance between opposing forces constantly shifts in favor of one or the other.

Freedom of Action

The 1982 edition of FM 100-5 in describing the tenet of "initiative" stated: "The underlying purpose of every encounter with the enemy is to seize or to retain independence of action." (11) Mao Tse Tung stated it this way: "In any war, the opponents contend for the initiative, whether on a battlefield, in a battle area, in a war zone or in the whole war, for the initiative means freedom of action for an army." (12) Both of these statements highlight the same key element: independence of action or freedom of action.

FM 100-5 now describes initiative as setting or changing of the terms of battle by action to force the enemy to conform to our operational purpose and tempo while retaining our own freedom of action. Stated another way, "Having the initiative equates to being in control; being in control is a prerequisite for success." (13) "Freedom of action" is in a sense the essence of initiative. Mao Tse Tung wrote that, "Flexibility[freedom of action] is a concrete expression of the initiative." (14) Then initiative at the operational level creates the necessary preconditions to allow the operational commander to execute his plan. For example, the commander conducts aggressive reconnaissance and other intelligence operations which provide knowledge of enemy dispositions and plans. This in turn allows the commander to anticipate enemy courses of action and prepare to frustrate them.

The Terms of Battle

It would be useful at this point to establish what the "terms of battle" are, in order to add clarity to the definition of initiative. Several terms of battle, though not specially stated, can be derived from FM 100-5. The time, place, and tempo of battle, as well as forces, appear from within the context of FM 100-5 to be terms of battle. (15) The terms of battle time and place refer to the choice of location and moment for actual combat between opposing forces. Both are generally the purview of the attacker, at least initially, but may be influenced by the defender's actions. The term of battle tempo refers to the pace or intensity of combat operations, which again is normally controlled initially by the attacker. The tempo is a total measure of several factors, which include rate of commitment of combat forces, depth and breath of combat activities, and number of supporting weapon systems employed. The term of battle forces consists of two factors: correlation of

forces at point of attack and commitment of reserves. The correlation of forces at point of attack is a measure of the ability to mass superior forces at the point of main effort. Commitment of reserves is a measure of a unit's ability to withhold its reserve until the opportune moment. Ideally the reserve would be committed for a positive aim (e.g. destroy enemy forces not blunt attack) and not be committed until the opposing force had committed its. Although there is a definite relationship between the terms of battle "tempo" and "forces" they are not equivalent terms. While tempo is partially a function of forces, forces alone do not equate to tempo. There may be other factors to consider, but these four terms of battle allow a broad application of the definition of initiative.

In summary FM 100-5 defines initiative as setting or changing the terms of battle by action to force the enemy to conform to our operational purpose and tempo while retaining our own freedom of action. It was stated that a tenet is like a principle and therefore a tenet should help explain the underlying idea which it represents. By virtue of being a tenet, initiative should help facilitate the decision-making process in the conduct of executing AirLand Battle. It is recognized that the term initiative, in common usage, implies an end state rather than a way to conduct AirLand Battle. However, the apparent contradiction is not irreconcilable. The tenet of initiative, as defined above, describes a way to obtain a desired end state in the conduct of AirLand Battle. The problem is that the end state uses the same term as the process to obtain that end state--"initiative." The important point is, if the tenet is understood and applied the end state will invariably be achieved. Emphasis should therefore be focused on initiative as a way rather than its result--an end state. This paper will use initiative in terms of both an end state and a way.

Concept of Defense

The concept of defense is one characterized by the act of waiting. Thus the defender awaits the blow of the attacker. It is this feature of awaiting the blow which Clausewitz cites as the "only test by which defense can be distinguished from attack in war." (16) He cautions, however, that pure defense, that is the act of waiting, is contrary to the idea of war.

. . . defense in war can only be relative, and the characteristic feature of waiting should be applied only to the basic concept, not to all of its components. . . . A battle is defensive if we await the attack--await, that is, the appearance of the enemy in front of our lines and within range. A campaign is defensive if we wait for our theater of operations to be invaded. (17)

In its most passive form the defense must at least be reactive or indeed the concept would have no utility. As Clausewitz states, even in the defense "our bullets take the offense." He points out that offensive action within the context of the larger defense is not a contradiction of the defensive concept.

. . . if we are really waging war, we must return the enemy's blows; and these offensive acts in a defensive war come under the heading of "defense"--in other words, our offensive takes place within our own positions or theater of operations. Thus, a defensive campaign can be fought with offensive battles, and in a defensive battle, we can employ our divisions offensively. . . . So the defensive form of war is not a simple shield, but a shield made up of well-directed blows. (18)

The Stronger Form of Warfare

Clausewitz states that the defense is intrinsically the stronger form of warfare and "not only offers greater probability of victory than attack, but

that its victories can attain the same proportions and results." (19) He attributes two basic advantages to the defense: the passing of time and the selection of the defensive position. "Any omission of attack--whether from bad judgment, fear, or indolence--accrues to the defenders' benefit." (20) The positional advantage of the defense would seem to contradict FM 100-5 which states: "The only advantage enjoyed by the attacker is the initial choice of when and where to strike." (21) However, put in the proper context the statements are reconcilable. In the first case, the defender does have the advantage initially of selecting his line of defense. This assumes of course that he is not yet in contact with the enemy or he has freedom of action despite contact. Additionally, it must be assumed that the attacking force can not achieve its aims without assailing the position chosen for defense. Within the context of these assumptions Clausewitz's assertion appears valid. In the second case, the attacker enjoys the initial choice of where to strike, given the above assumptions are invalid. In addition, the attacker always enjoys the freedom to select the exact point of the defense which he will assail. As FM 100-5 points out it is the "where" and "when" of the attack that is the major challenge of the defense to overcome.

Purpose of the Defense

The purpose of the defense is to "retain ground, gain time, deny the enemy access to an area, and damage or defeat attacking forces." (22) While the immediate purpose of the defense is to defeat the attack, the ultimate objective must be the transition to the offensive for it is the more decisive form of warfare. This the defense accomplishes by causing the attack to reach or exceed its culmination point, thereby establishing the preconditions for successful transition to the offense.

Characteristics of the Defense

Defensive operations under AirLand Battle doctrine are characterized by four fundamentals: preparation, disruption, concentration, and flexibility. Preparation includes all those measures taken prior to the fight to enhance the defense. At the operational level they include such things as positioning forces in depth, organizing for movement and support throughout the theater, reconnaissance, and preparing deceptions. When Clausewitz spoke of unused time accruing to the defender he was talking about preparation. Disruption includes all those measures taken by the defender to destroy the synchronization of the enemy's attack. At the operational level they include such things as spoiling operations, special operations, psychological operations, and interdiction of critical routes, forces and facilities. Concentration includes those measures taken to facilitate rapid massing of forces and or firepower to defeat the attacker at points of decision. At the operational level they include organizing and positioning of reserves, organizing defense in depth and plans for massing of fires. Flexibility includes those measures taken to insure the defender has the necessary agility to counter or evade the attacker's blow, then strike back. At the operational level they include branches and sequels to battle and campaign plans and the retention of operational reserves.

Having established the basic concepts for "initiative" and "defense", two military campaigns will now be examined to provide an insight on the role of initiative within the context of the operational defense.

The Portugal Campaign

Strategic Overview

In late 1809 the French had nearly 250,000 troops occupying and fighting in Spain. For this campaign, Lisbon was the ultimate objective as Napoleon boldly stated in the Le Moniteur, dated 27 September. This would be the third attempt to seize the port of Lisbon, General Junot and then Marshal Soult having both suffered defeat at the hands of Wellington in prior efforts.

Although the frontier border of Portugal extends for 600 miles, Wellington's task of defending his theater of operations was facilitated by a formidable series of natural terrain features. Only two main invasion routes would support wheeled traffic. The northern route began at Ciudad Rodrigo, passed through Almeida, then Coimbra and south to the prize, Lisbon, the capital and lifeline to the British navy. Barring this route were the Spanish and Portuguese fortresses at Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida respectively; but the road then had to wind its way across the steep massif of the Serra da Estrela between Celorico and Coimbra, confronting yet another major obstacle, the Ponte da Mucella. Here an abrupt ridge commanded the only bridge across the Alva river, carrying the most direct road from Celorico to Coimbra south of the Mondego valley. The southern route beginning from Merida had to confront the fortresses Badajoz and Elvas before proceeding west to Lisbon.

Wellington, armed with instructions to defend Portugal as long as possible and mindful of Napoleon's stated objective, proceeded to Lisbon to conduct a detailed reconnaissance. On 20 October after a thorough reconnaissance, Wellington directed his chief engineer to site and construct defensive works

FROM: History of the Peninsular. Oman



MAP 1

to supplement the defensibility of the terrain. The most important and extensive of these were the Lines of Tôrres Vedras.

Wellington's forces by the spring of 1810 consisted of five regular and one light infantry divisions plus a cavalry division. Each division consisted of two British and one Portuguese brigade. The army included 35,000 British, 20,000 Portuguese regulars, and 30,000 militia equipped with British weapons and capable of static defensive duties. To supplement these forces Wellington put into force the 'Home Guard' which consisted of every able-bodied man between the ages of sixteen and sixty; although untrained and only partially armed, they formed bands of active partisans thoroughly familiar with the countryside. Further, Wellington persuaded the Portuguese Regency to issue a 'scorched earth' policy to the frontier districts. Realizing the enemy's most probable line of advance would be through Ciudad Rodrigo, Wellington placed the bulk of his army astride the northern invasion route while sending a strong detachment to Badajoz to guard the southern approach. (23)

On 17 April 1810 Napoleon created the Armee de Portugal consisting of II Corps (Reynier), VI Corps (Ney), VIII Corps (Junot) and a cavalry reserve. Napoleon gave Marshal Massena command, and directed him to besiege first Ciudad Rodrigo and then Almeida, but not to invade Portugal until September, after the hot weather and the harvest. (24)

The Invasion Begins

Ciudad Rodrigo was well armed and provisioned with a garrison of 5500 Spanish troops under a veteran commander. Surrounded by a rampart it crowned a steep hill on the east bank of the Agueda and covered the road-bridge leading to the Portuguese fortress of Almeida. On 24 June Massena took personal charge of what was to be a twenty-four day siege. After an intense

sixteen day bombardment one of the main magazines exploded and a large breach was created in the rampart. The garrison commander capitulated on 9 July and Massena ordered Ney forward to Almeida and the invasion of Portugal.

Screening the fortress of Almeida was a British light infantry force of 4000 men. Faced by Marshal Ney's 24,000 strong corps, the British retired to Pinhel after a short engagement with the French, leaving the fortress of Almeida isolated. On Massena's instructions Ney invested it on 15 August and again the seige-train, supplemented by Spanish guns from Ciudad Rodrigo, was brought forward. Almeida, a formidable fortress with walls of solid granite, was impervious to anything but large caliber guns and itself mounted one hundred cannon. The fortress was well provisioned with ample ammunition. The garrison consisted of 4500 Portuguese regulars and militia. It was Wellington's hope that the fortress could hold out for at least two months, allowing the autumn rains to hamper further the invaders progress. (25)

The French bombardment of Almeida began on 26 August. Only fourteen hours later disaster struck. A leaking powder barrel had left a loose trail of powder leading to the main magazine which was ignited by a French shell. Seventy tons of powder blew up, destroying the ammunition supply and killing half of the gunners. The twelve day siege ended on 27 August when Almeida capitulated.

On 15 September Massena's army advanced to Celorico, being in no hurry because of Napoleon's instructions. While Napoleon's order had been designed to ensure a new harvest for his Army of Portugal to subsist on, Wellington's scorched earth policy left the French with the cupboard bare. (26) Having concentrated his entire army in the Guarda-Celorico-Pinhel area, Massena was ready to advance on Lisbon via Coimbra. After detaching garrisons to protect

lines of communication Massena's Army totaled 65,000 effectives. The French faced an Anglo-Portuguese army mustering 59,000, half British and half Portuguese. Success, although rapid, had not been without cost. The French had suffered the loss of 2000 men, 1500 horses, and 6000 sick and a large portion of its ammunition expended while the supply trains were suffering the effects of the marauding Spanish guerilleras, and the troops' pay was months in arrears.

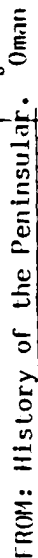
Wellington expected that Massena would take the direct Celorico-Coimbra road. He therefore decided to make his next stand at Ponte da Mucela; but instead, Massena chose to follow a northerly route to Viseu on two separate axes. These roads proved to be some of the worst in Portugal causing considerable damage to field guns and wagons and further delaying the advance. Upon discovering the true French intention Wellington shifted his forces to Serra do Bussaco, where the French would now have to pass.

The Battle of Bussaco

The defensive value of the Serra do Bussaco was not wasted by Wellington. He quickly assembled his main forces on the dominating ridge sitting astride the French route of advance and was further aided in his efforts when Massena delayed six days in Viseu. On 21 September Wellington established his headquarters in a monastery near the crest of the Bussaco ridge, where he remained for the next seven days. The following day he instructed two divisions to be ready to move from Ponte Murcella to the north side of the Mondego River to join the forces at Bussaco ridge.

On 24 September the Anglo-Portuguese covering force fought a skirmish with the French vanguard, Reynier's Corps. Reynier's corps deployed to the south of the road while Ney came up on his right and engaged the covering force in the village of Moura at the base of the Bussaco ridge. On the following day

Position of the Troops at the commencement of the French Attack



13.V. Berkshire, Oxford, 1907

Wellington ordered his covering force to withdraw to the main position.

With the arrival of both divisions from Ponte Murcella, Wellington had by the morning of 26 September concentrated 50,000 men and sixty guns on the dominating Bussaco ridge. The forces were deployed behind the crest so that only a screen of outposts was visible to the French. Because the ridge was too extensive to be held everywhere in strength, Wellington grouped his forces along the ridge with emphasis on the two most likely French avenues of approach. These position were on the main road to Coimbra and along a rough road which crossed a saddle above the village of S. Antonio. Wellington placed a reserve to support the defense of the main road and positioned cavalry to cover both his flanks and the Oporto-Coimbra road.

Early on the morning of 26 September both Reynier and Ney reported to Massena they were in contact with what appeared to be a rear guard on the lower slopes of Bussaco in a strong position. After considerable delay the two corps commanders received instructions to wait for the arrival of Massena who finally appeared in late afternoon. After reviewing the situation and holding a conference with his command group Massena issued an order. His plan was to deliver a frontal assault with II Corps on what he imagined to be the enemy's right flank, followed by a knockout blow by VI Corps on the Bussaco monastery, which he rightly judged to be the key to the position. The attack would commence at daybreak the next morning.

II Corps launched their attack on a two division front breasting a saddle above the village of S. Antonio. As they topped the rise they were met by a hail of musketry and grape shot from Picton's 3rd Division, numbering 5000. Although the French actually made the crest a British bayonet charge repelled their efforts. Again they renewed their attack but now were crushed by a

flanking counterattack from Leith's division which had responded to the sound of firing.

When Ney saw Reynier's leading troops reach the crest he ordered both lead divisions forward, one on each side of the Coimbra road to take their objective, the Bussaco monastery. Their direction of attack followed the road up a horseshoe gully enfiladed by the fire of twenty British and Portuguese guns. The French faced the combined strength of a Portuguese brigade and a British light division which totaled nearly 6500 men. The French made steady progress up the slope, driving the enemy from the village of Sula. They advanced from the village, shrapnel now tearing great gaps in the ranks as they struggled to breast the steeper rise beyond. Their efforts were rewarded by a response equal to that given to Reynier's II Corps. As they crested a little plateau British light infantry rose from their cover behind the crest and charged the exhausted French with the bayonet. Loison's division was routed in the process with the loss of 1200 soldiers while Marchand's division on the left of the road were driven back with equal losses by the intense volleys of Pack's Portuguese brigade. Ney ordered the division to retire.

Realizing the uselessness of further efforts Massena terminated the fight. More than a corps plus the cavalry had yet to enter the fight, but Massena's best fighting troops, veterans of Austerlitz and Friedland, had been severely mauled. The day's fighting had cost the French 4486 casualties while Wellington's forces suffered only 1252.

The Lines of Tôrres Vedras

Only now did Massena put his cavalry to work on both flanks to find routes to turn the Serra Bussaco. Reconnaissance in the north proved successful and the French withdrew back to Mortagoa to take a narrow road north-westward

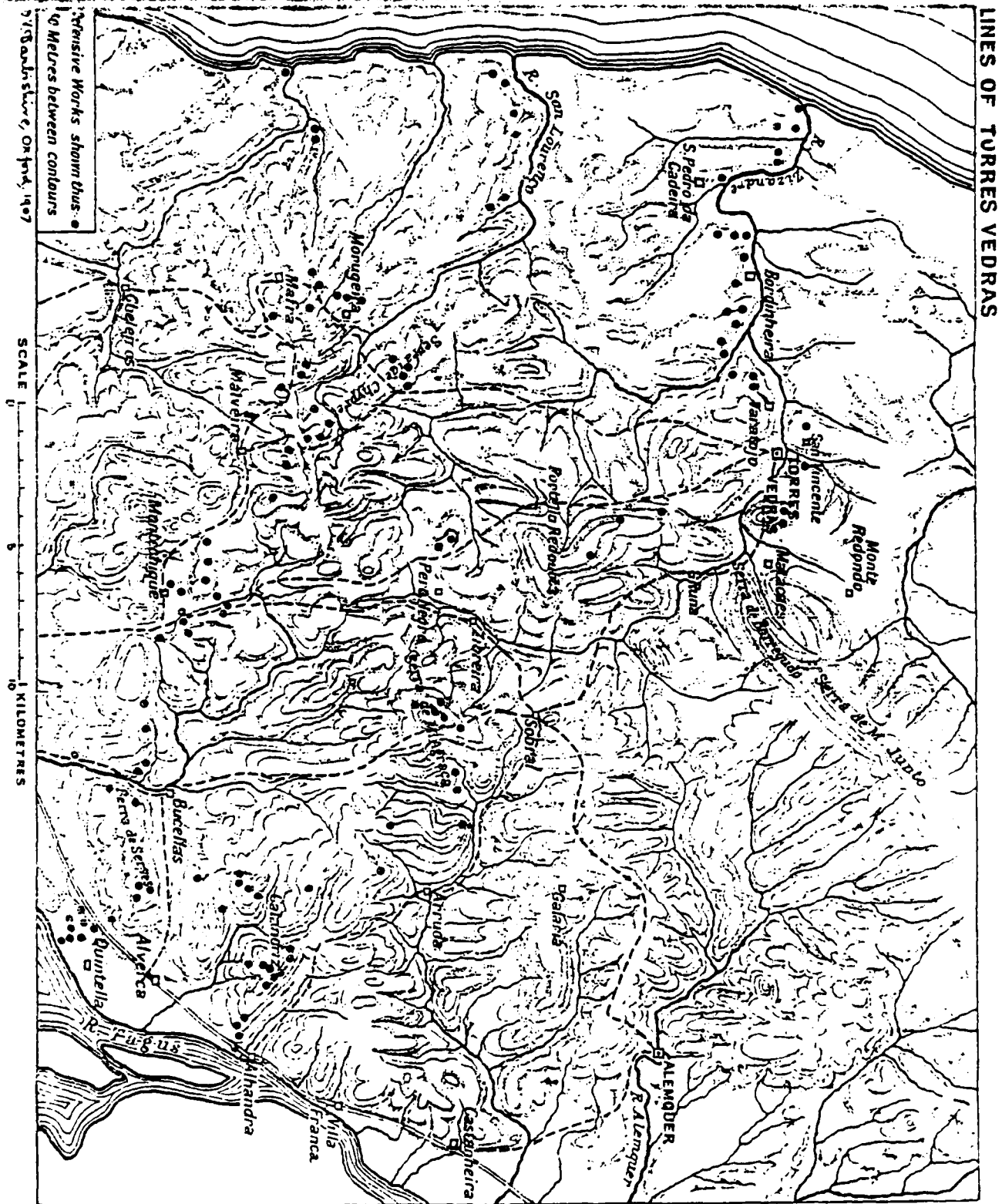
which brought the French army to the coastal plain road 25 miles north of Coimbra. This move was what Wellington had expected. (27) With a rearguard in position and cavalry dispatched to delay the French end run, Wellington withdrew his army, moving virtually unmolested to Tôrres Vedras.

Close behind Wellington, the French army crossed the Mondego river unaware of the extensive fortified zone that lay in their path. By now the Portuguese Militia and the Spanish home guard had cut Massena's line of communications by isolating Almeida. To make matters worse, Portuguese militiamen captured the French hospital on 6 October when Massena left it behind at Coimbra with a mere company for protection. This further interdicted the French lines of communications and adversely affected troop morale. (28)

By 10 October the Anglo-Portuguese army had withdrawn to its positions within the fortified lines. The following morning the French cavalry squadrons faced an impenetrable line of fortifications on every road between the sea and the Tagus. (29) Massena made a personal reconnaissance on 14 October and immediately realized the significance of the positions that he was facing. "Massena did the only thing possible--he sat down in front of the Lines and waited for a whole month, his only chance of success being to tempt Wellington to leave the shelter of the Lines and attack him." Wellington with his lifeline to the British navy secured was satisfied to wait the French out.

On the night of 14 November, having realized the futility of his situation, Massena withdrew his army to the northeast and assumed a strong defensive posture at Santarém, behind the Rio Maior marshes. Wellington was not inclined to challenge such a strong French position, for time was still on his side. Early in march 1811 Massena began his retreat from Portugal, closely pursued by Wellington. Once again Wellington had frustrated Napoleon's efforts to bring Portugal to bay.

FROM: History of the Peninsular. Oman



Analysis of the Portugal Campaign

An analysis of the defensive phase of Wellington's Portugal campaign can now be conducted to discover to what degree "initiative" was a part of his success. The use of the "terms of battle" will assist the process of measuring the degree of initiative manifested by Wellington at the operational level during his campaign.

Setting the Terms of Battle

The essence of the operational art involves resolving the dilemma of when, where, and for what purpose to seek or accept battle. When Wellington designed his campaign plan he displayed a solid understanding of the operational art. His plan called for delaying the French Army at the frontier fortresses to allow the thorough preparation of his theater of operations for a defense in depth. Once the invading forces entered his theater of operations he would engage the enemy only where the terrain afforded him highly favorable terms of battle without restricting his freedom of action. His plan from the start called for measures which would ensure the protection of his lines of communication and the survival of his army.

Wellington began the campaign with most of the terms of battle in his favor. The time the invasion began was in the hands of the French but Napoleon had already made his intentions clear in September 1809, therefore, the element of surprise was not a factor in the French favor. At least initially, then, the term of battle "time" was a neutral factor. The term of battle "forces" was clearly on the French side initially because they possessed the superior number of troops. This factor was somewhat ameliorated,

however, because Wellington chose to defend two fortresses which did not provide the French the opportunity to maximize their superior forces.

The terms of battle "place" and "tempo" were initially the prerogative of Wellington's Army. With only two reasonable invasion routes existing for the French to utilize Wellington was able to select with a high degree of confidence the place he would initially engage the French. Both invasion routes were guarded by dual fortresses and Wellington wisely chose to take advantage of their defensive value. This course of action also allowed Wellington to concentrate his forces at the points of decision regardless of the 600 mile frontier border.

As long as Wellington's forces held the fortresses they also controlled the term of battle "tempo". This is true because the French advance into Portugal could not proceed as long as the British controlled the fortresses which in turn dominated the lines of communication. This meant that the initial French effort would be a costly and time consuming siege to reduce these obstacles. Wellington expected to delay the French Army for several months but in point of fact the disasters that befell both Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida fortresses upset his plans.

The opportunity to press Wellington's Anglo-Portuguese Army before they could reestablish a coordinated defense lay at Massena's feet, but he chose not to take it. In fairness to Massena he was only following his instructions from Napoleon not to begin the advance into Portugal until mid September. Napoleon's intent was to ensure the French Army would benefit from the fall harvest while enjoying more pleasant weather. So Massena did not take advantage of the rapid demise of the frontier fortresses but instead delayed his advance for over two weeks until 15 September.

The decision to delay the advance backfired totally and left the opportunity to exercise initiative clearly in Wellington's hands. By delaying the extra time Wellington was able to sustain the tempo and operational purpose of his original plan because the French had forfeited the opportunity to change the terms of battle in their favor. Not only did the French consume over two weeks of supply for no gain but they allowed Wellington to carry out his scorched earth policy and fully reposition his forces for the next battle. If Massena had pressed ahead immediately he would have dictated the tempo and possibly the next place of battle. In addition, the chances are great that insufficient time would have been available fully to carry out a scorched earth policy before the French advance. Wellington's knowledge of the French methods of warfare allowed him successfully to anticipate Massena's plan and take actions to defeat that plan. On the other hand, Massena's plans failed to consider the capabilities or intentions of the enemy and made no provision for contingencies.

The Place of Battle

Once Massena penetrated the fortresses at Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida there were only three realistic routes for the army of Portugal to take. One of these routes, the Estrada Nova, ran from Guarda to Thomar while the other two routes, one on either side of the Mondego River, joined up again at Coimbra. Wellington had his engineers make several long cuttings at points where the track passed along precipices making the Estrada Nova all but impassable.

(30) With this accomplished Wellington could confidently mass his forces in the vicinity of Coimbra confident that Massena must pass that point. He had limited the French freedom of action thereby ensuring the "place" he would next have a battle with his opponent. Wellington had expected Massena

to move on the south bank of the Mondego to Ponte Murcella where he had prepared extensive defensive works. When Massena chose instead to move on the north bank and pass through Bussaco, Wellington was in position to take advantage of the opportunity offered him. He was eager to offer the French a battle at Bussaco because the terrain ensured the conditions for success. Had the French chosen to take the road to Ponte Murcella the British had also prepared earthworks which would have made the crossing of the Alva River costly, although still a better choice than the one the French selected.

Although Wellington was surprised by Massena's decision to take the road to Bussaco he was also elated at the opportunity it offered him. Massena's slow advance further assisted Wellington by allowing him to concentrate his forces at place he desired to give battle next. Massena should have conducted reconnaissance and sent forces around the Bussaco ridge position as he eventually did but only after being badly bloodied at Bussaco. If he had done this Wellington would have had to accept battle on Massena's terms or retreat without giving battle. Instead Wellington continued to control the tempo and the pace of battle and maintain his freedom of action.

Once Wellington had bloodied the French at Bussaco Ridge, the enemy decided to flank him rather than persist in futile attempts against his dominating defensive positions. But Wellington was still dealing the cards; anticipating the enemy's next move, he had already decided his next place of battle would be the Lines of Tórres Vedras. When Massena reached the Lines of Torres Vedras he realized once again that the British were still dictating the conditions under which they would give battle. Instead of assailable flanks, only the teeth of a fortified zone were presented to the French. They could choose to attack when and where they wanted but in all cases Wellington would

control both the tempo and forces at point of attack.

A well-timed retreat, which enables us to keep all the initiative is of great assistance to us in switching to the counter-offensive when, having reached the terminal point for our retreat, we have regrouped our forces and are waiting at our ease for the fatigued enemy. (31)

Wellington did not use first-line infantry in the fortification line; the garrisons were composed of Portuguese Militia and Home Guard, thus setting free his field army of 35,000 British and 25,000 Portuguese regulars for maneuver and counterattack. (32) Wellington's headquarters was located in the center of the front line with a magnificent observation post, 1292 feet high, close by where he could scan the whole countryside. The Royal Navy had helped establish a system of nine semaphore signal stations within the fortification line. With these measures in place Wellington had both the agility and freedom of action to mass forces faster than the French.

Wellington had not left anything to chance which he could influence or control. He had developed plans and defensive works to support the withdrawal of his army (Portuguese regulars included) by the British Navy from vicinity of Fort Sao Juliao, should it be necessary. A flotilla of fourteen gun-boats manned by the Royal Navy ensured that if an invasion force penetrated to the Tagus a water crossing by boat would be foiled.

Despite the enormity of Wellington's preparations, he was able to maintain a cloak of secrecy around his operations. Massena was unaware of the Lines of Tórres Vedras until he reached Coimbra. This is quite amazing considering this massive work was under construction for eleven months prior to his arrival. Had Napoleon been more reticent about his plans for Portugal Wellington no doubt would have been less well prepared for the invasion.

Tempo of Operations

Wellington went to great lengths to control the tempo of combat actions in his theater. To accomplish this task he used all resources and methods available to him. He actively enlisted the help of the political leadership to draw on the help of the militia, the Home Guard, and instituted a scorched earth policy within Portugal. The activation of the Home Guard effectively made every able-bodied man between sixteen and sixty in Portugal a threat to the invader. This factor together with the Spanish guerillas operating in the rear areas, increased the depth and breath of the area of operations in which the French were forced to operate. The French were unable during much of the campaign in Portugal to secure their lines of communication and were effectively cut off once the French army moved south of Coimbra. Under these circumstances the French had to sustain their operations by living off the countryside, as was their normal procedure, but the scorched earth policy prevented them from being able to do so effectively. The increasing energy required by the French to forage as they moved deeper into Portugal sapped the strength of the invading army, further eroding their tempo of operations.

Wellington had stolen the initiative from Massena from the very start. He had made Massena conform to his operational purpose and tempo by fighting battles only at places of his choosing despite being on the defensive. Wellington's blueprint for the campaign was orchestrated skillfully, and designed to make full use of Portugal's geography; this limited Massena's freedom of action and reduced the contingencies Wellington had to be prepared to meet. Wellington had used the stronger form of war against Massena to establish the conditions for final victory. With the use of the geography and the help of his engineers Wellington had stripped away the advantage of the

offense: time and place of attack.

In the final analysis the use of the defense by Wellington in Portugal did not require forfeiting the initiative at the operational level. Knowing his enemy and their methods Wellington chose an effective means to deal with the French army. Defensive actions, if they result in setting or changing the terms of battle favorably while maintaining the freedom of action, constitute initiative.

Occasionally also defense may not connote weakness. It may be the object of the defending commander to exploit the known impetuosity of his opponent in attack, to punish him severely and to launch a counter-stroke. Such was frequently the policy of Wellington in Spain. . . . And though it may not be often--perhaps not often enough--that a commander chooses the defensive from strength rather than from weakness, it can be said that few commanders choose the defensive at all without the hope of striking back sooner or later.
(33)

Slim's Imphal-Kohima Campaign

Strategic Overview

In early 1944 the Japanese began planning for a new offensive in Burma. The objective was to break through to Assam, thereby eliminating the supply line which fed Stillwell's Northern Combat Area Command in Burma and the HUMP operation supplying forces in China. (34) The necessary stepping stone for this Japanese aim was the Imphal plain, "a natural half-way house and staging place for any great military movement in either direction between India and Burma." (35) The new commander of the Burma Area Army was Lieutenant General Kawabe, who had six divisions, two in southwest Burma under his direct supervision and four to the north, under LTG Mutaguchi's 15th Army. (36)

Opposing this Japanese menace was General Slim's 14th Army, composed of the XV and IV corps. The XV corps was fighting in Arakan while the IV corps, commanded by Lieutenant General Scoones, was postured to defend the Imphal plain. With a frontage of 250 miles Scoones had concentrated his forces at critical points on his lines of communications (LOC) which ran parallel to the enemy front. His 17th Division was at Tiddim, on the southern terminus of a LOC which ran north to Imphal. Here it split, one track continuing to Ukhrul where the 50 Indian Parachute Brigade secured the corps northern flank; the other branch was the main LOC running from Imphal north through Kohima to Dimapur, the railhead terminus critical to the survival of forces in central Burma. The 20th Division was positioned at Tamu and Scoones retained the 23rd Division as a striking force at Imphal with the corps headquarters.

The Japanese plan of attack actually began in early February in the second

Arakan campaign as the Japanese counterattacked Slim's XV Corps in an unsuccessful attempt to draw XIV Army's reserves south. It was Kawabe's intent to concentrate all of Mutaguchi's 15th Army (nearly 100,000 veteran combat troops) against Scoones IV corps and penetrate to Dimapur and Assam. Mutaguchi's plans called for sending the 33rd Division north from Ft. White against the British 17th Division at Tiddim, followed by the 15th and 31st Divisions crossing the Chindwin river from Thaungdut and Homalin respectively. The 15th Division was to capture Imphal while the 31st Division farther north would assault Ukhrul, Jessami, and Kohima, cutting the IV corps LOC's. The campaign was to take three weeks and depended on the use of captured British supplies.

Slim anticipated the Japanese offensive. He knew that the present disposition of Scoone's Corps was ill prepared to deal with the coming Japanese plan of attack. Spread out as they were, the corps' divisions could be isolated and destroyed piecemeal. There remained three alternatives: cross the Chindwin and attack the enemy first, hold the Japanese 33rd Division in the Tiddim area and fight the enemy on the Chindwin river line while he had forces on both banks, or concentrate IV corps in the Imphal plain and fight a decisive battle on ground of his choosing. (37) Slim chose the third alternative.

Having made his decision Slim began the task of putting the Imphal plain into a state of defense. The two all-weather airfields at Imphal and Pael, vital to the defense both for supporting air squadrons and for air supply, became the main strong-points in the defense scheme. The garrisons for these areas came mainly from the administrative troops, keeping the fighting formations free to maneuver. Slim planed to pull the 17th and 20th Divisions back into the defensive sector of the Imphal plain once the Japanese began their

offensive. From this position the corps would fight a decisive battle, even if isolated, using airpower to resupply and reinforce if need be.

The Japanese Attack Begins

Slim's estimate of the Japanese plan of battle was close to the mark but his timing of their attack was not. He and his staff had reasoned the Japanese offensive would begin on 15 March. On 6 March Mutaguchi launched the 33d Division across the Manipur River from east to west, then north against the 17th Division at Tiddim. Not recognizing this as the start of the general offensive, the 17th Division held fast until ominous news was received on the 13th that a Japanese force was sixty miles north of Tiddim and just west of the Tiddim-Imphal road. On receiving this news Scoones instructed 17th Division to withdraw to Imphal. The following day the Japanese cut the road behind the division; the 17th would now have to conduct a fighting withdrawal.

On the night of the 15th the Japanese 15th and 31st Divisions which were poised along the east bank of the Chindwin from Tanga to Tamanthi began to cross that river. The 15th Division, with the mission to isolate and capture Imphal, attacked in three columns moving against the 20th Division and north of Imphal. At the same time the Japanese 31st Division moving in eight columns from Homalin advanced on a forty-mile front. Their intent was to cut the LOC's between Imphal and Kohima and then converge on Kohima for a knockout blow. On 30 March, having been delayed a valuable ten days by the Indian Parachute Brigade and a battalion of the 23rd Division at Ukhrul, the Japanese thrust finally broke through and cut the Imphal-Kohima road establishing a strong road-block.

Realizing the 17th Division was cutoff, Scoones sent first one, then a second brigade of the 23th Division to fight down the road to their relief.

On 20 March after much hard fighting the patrols of both divisions met at Milestone 102, thwarting the efforts of the Japanese to isolate and destroy the 17th Division. After some additional fighting the 17th Division reached Imphal on 5 April having inflicted greater losses on the Japanese than it suffered. The Japanese Air force had made one major attempt to attack the retreating column but without serious effect. The British command of the air was to prove an essential ingredient in the outcome of the campaign.

With the threat of the main Japanese advance on Imphal from the east growing more menacing, Scoones was compelled to reestablish a reserve to replace the brigades of the 23rd Division sent to rescue the 17th. His only choice was to draw on the heavily pressed 20th Division which was ordered to fall back to Shenam, about nine miles from Palel. On 2 April 32d Brigade was withdrawn into Corps reserve, leaving the 20th two brigades to defend the southeastern approaches to the plain.

Although Slim had anticipated the Japanese' plan rather well, he had underestimated both their speed of movement and their ability to mass significant forces north of Imphal to threaten Kohima and Dimapur.

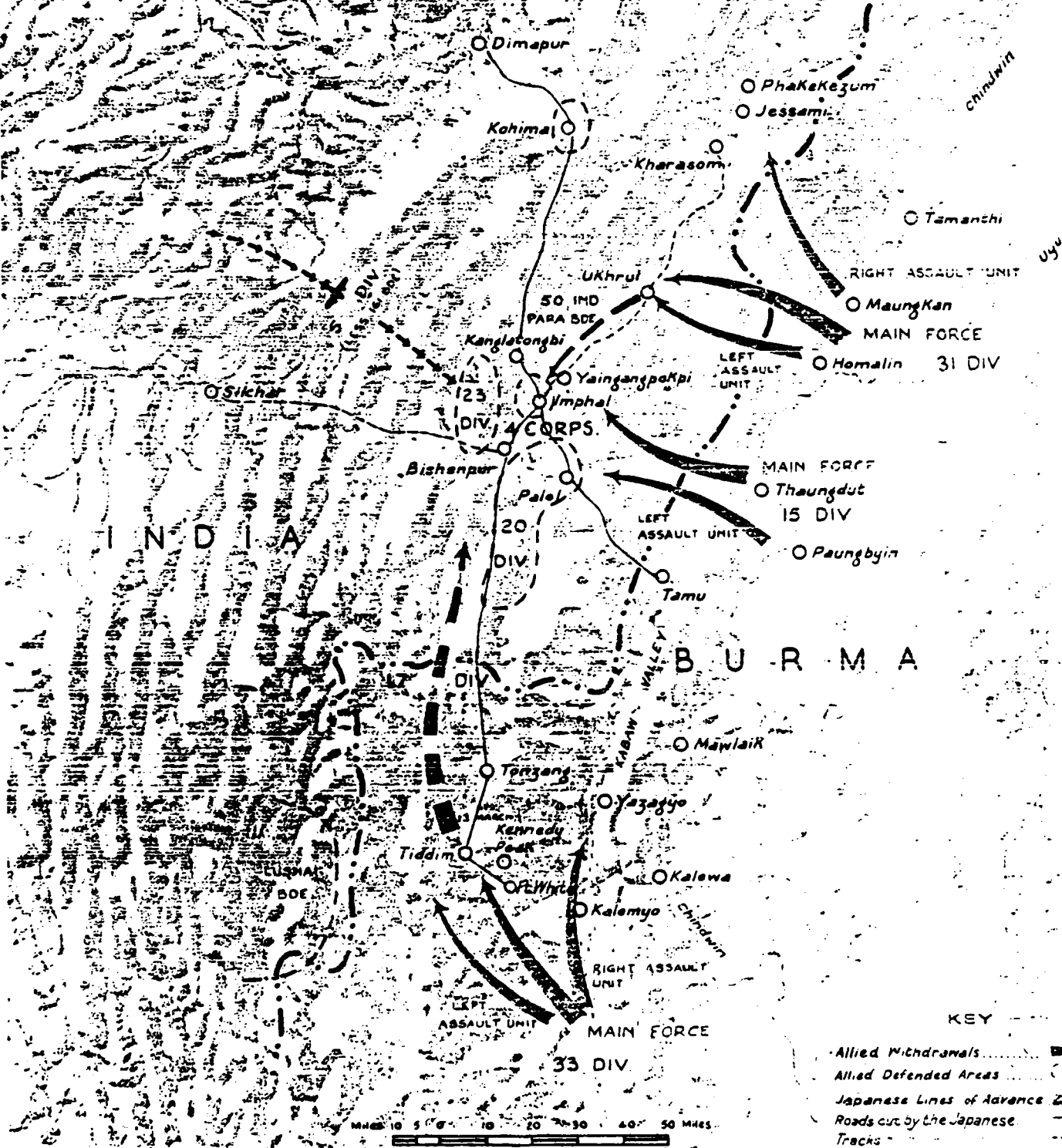
Not only were enemy columns closing in on Kohima at much greater speed than I had expected, but they were obviously in much greater strength. Indeed it was soon evident that the bulk, if not the whole, of the Japanese 31st Division was driving for Kohima and Dimapur. I had been confident that the most the enemy could bring and maintain through such country would be one regimental group, the equivalent of a British brigade group. (38)

Within a week from the start of the Japanese offensive it became clear that a greater threat to Kohima and Dimapur existed than what was developing at Imphal. Kohima with a small garrison and Dimapur with none were in a perilous situation if something was not done quickly to stem the Japanese

ATTEMPTED INVASION OF INDIA - PHASE 2

MAP 4

14 MARCH 1944



FROM: Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff: South-East Asia 1943-1945. Mountbatten

advance. While the loss of Kohima could be endured, that of Dimapur might be fatal. (39)

Slim Reacts

Slim immediately ordered the movement of the 5th Indian Division and 3d Special Service Brigade from Arakan by air. It was necessary to transfer thirty aircraft from the China lift operation to Troop Carrier Command to accomplish the required movement schedule. Slim convinced Admiral Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander Southeast Asia, of the urgent need for the aircraft transfer and Mountbatten agreed. The fly-in of the 5th Indian Division began on 17 March and by 27 March two brigades and the division troops had been deployed to Imphal. Slim diverted the third brigade to Manipur.

Having taken these immediate arrangements Slim told the XV Corps commander to get the 7th Indian Division to Chittagong, ready to follow to Assam. Slim obtained the 23d Long-Range Penetration Brigade as well as the 25th Indian Division from General Giffard, the 11th Army Group Commander. The 25th Division sent by sea would replace the 5th that had been pulled out and the 23d Brigade would move by rail to Jorhat, where it could protect Ledo and flank attack the flank of any attempt on Dimapur. Further agreeing to Slim's requests General Giffard sent from his reserve in India the 33d Corps Headquarters and the 2nd British Division. The British 2nd Division began its movement to Dimapur on 18 March and the 33d Corps Commander arrived at Slim's headquarters on the 23rd. To ensure the ability to sustain these additional forces Slim began the withdrawal of thousands of non-combatants from Imphal by air, road, and rail.

With these arrangements in place the IV corps had to hold until sufficient forces arrived to stem the tide. As the newly formed Assam Regiment fought

a valiant delaying action 30 miles east of Kohima, desperate efforts were in hand to make the Kohima ridge a road-block to bar the way to Dimapur. Scoones had his hands full with a major battle, so Slim placed Major-General Ranking, rear area commander of Assam, in charge of operations in the Kohima-Dimapur-Jorhat theater until the arrival of 33d Corps.

Reports indicated that the Japanese 31st Division was ten to twenty miles from Kohima and the forward screen could not hope to delay them long. The decision was made to hold the Kohima Ridge which was a preferable defensive position to Dimapur. Slim gave three directives to Ranking: prepare Dimapur for defence and when attacked, hold it; reinforce Kohima and hold it to the last; and make all preparations for the rapid reception and assembly of the large reinforcements on the way. Fortunately, the Japanese commander was intent on following his orders to take Kohima and dig in and did not take advantage of Dimapur's precarious situation. "All the Japanese commander had to do was to leave a detachment to mask Kohima, and, with the rest of his division, thrust violently on Dimapur. He could hardly fail to take it." (40)

On 3 April, General Stopford established his 33d Corps headquarters at Jorhat and on the next day took over control from Ranking. His directives from Slim were: prevent Japanese penetration into the Brahmaputra or Surma Valleys or through the Lushai Hills, keep open the Dimapur-Kohima-Imphal road, and move to the help of IV corps and cooperate with it in the destruction of all enemy west of the Chindwin. Slim decided the 33d Corps' immediate tasks were to cover the concentration of 33d corps as far forward as practicable, secure the Dimapur base, reinforce and hold Kohima and protect as far as possible without jeopardizing the first three tasks the Assam railway and the China route airfields in the Brahmaputra Valley.

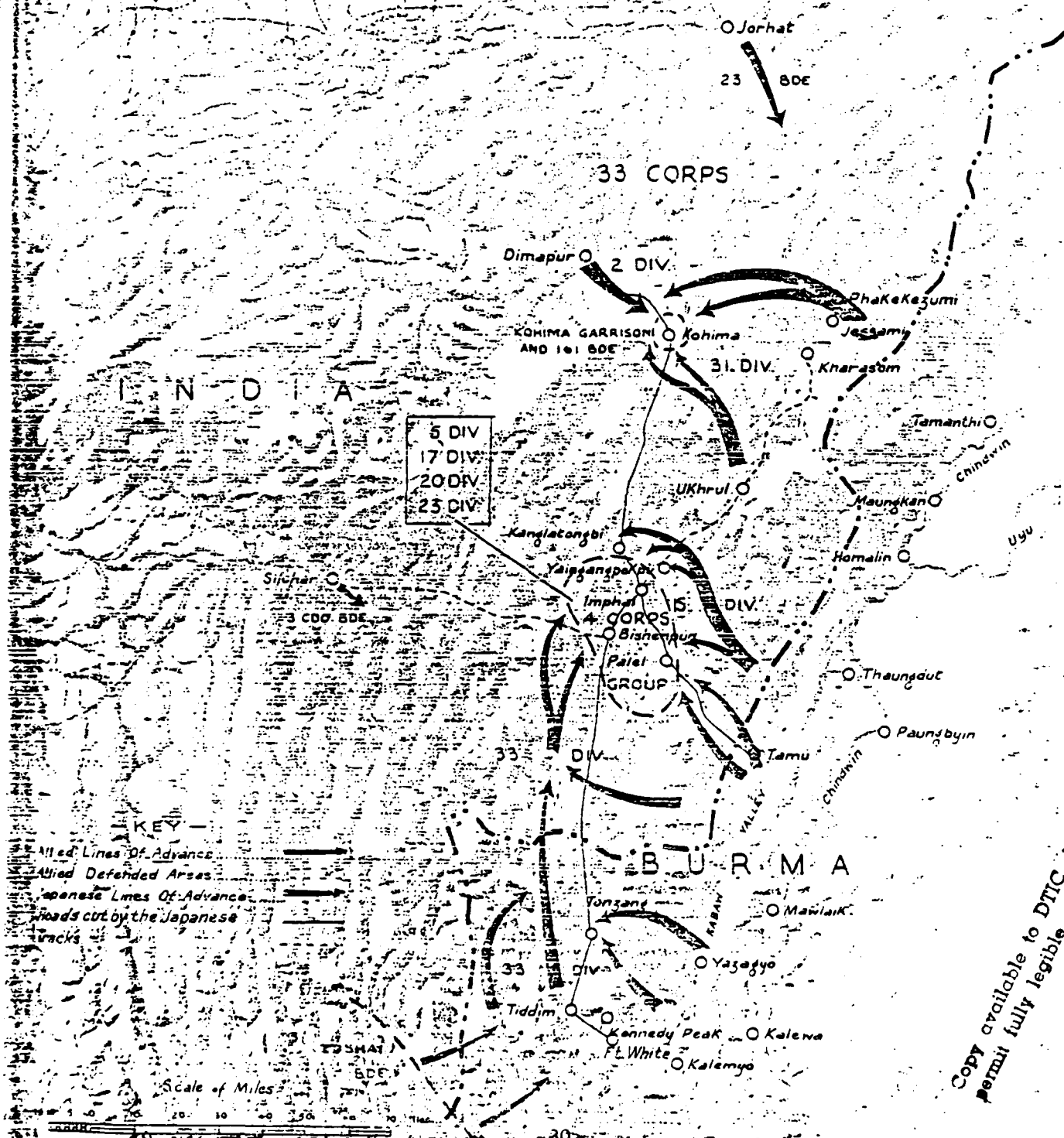
On 4 April Stopford ordered the 161st Brigade to reinforce Kohima but only the lead battalion linked with the garrison before the Japanese completely invested the town. The garrison of three thousand was closely invested now by superior forces and the 161st Brigade was cut off five miles to the north. A detachment was holding the Nichugard defile south-east of Dimapur and the base itself was unable to resist a serious attack. The good news was that elements of the British 2nd Division which had been scattered in southern India were now beginning to arrive in Dimapur.

The Tide Turns

By the beginning of April Scoones had the better part of four divisions to defend Imphal and Slim was confident that the IV Corps would hold. He therefore gave priority to the battle at Kohima which was still up for grabs. The battle for Kohima continued with the Japanese making frontal attacks by day and then by night as British aircraft exacted too high a toll during the day. The critical point in the battle was reached the 2nd week in April when the garrison, almost out of water, was confined to a space five hundred yards square. On 15 April the siege was broken when 33d Corps reinforcements effected linkup with the Kohima garrison and the immediate crisis passed. This was only the beginning of what was to be a battle of attrition over the next two months before the Japanese hold was finally broken on the Kohima-Imphal road.

Like the battle of Kohima the battle for Imphal plain was to drag on into June but it was never in much doubt from mid-May on. (41) On 22 June the Imphal-Kohima road was finally cleared and the Japanese strangle hold was completely broken. The Japanese had gambled on a three week campaign and lost--". . . the first decisive battle of the Burma campaign, was not yet over, but it was won." (42)

ATTEMPTED INVASION OF INDIA — DEVELOPMENT OF PHASE 2 APRIL — 1944 MAP 5



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Analysis of the Imphal-Kohima Campaign

The defensive phase of the Imphal-Kohima campaign marked the turning point in the whole Burma war. It had been General Slim's plan from the start to fight a decisive defensive battle in the Imphal plain. He maintained that "there are three reasons for retreat: self-preservation, to save your force from destruction; pressure elsewhere which makes you accept loss of territory in one place to enable you to transfer troops to a more vital front; and, lastly, to draw the enemy into a situation so unfavorable to him that the initiative must pass to you."⁴³ It was this last reason which Slim had banked on to turn the tide against the Japanese. He believed ". . . that it was possible to fight defensively and even to retreat, yet keep the initiative. (44)

The Japanese Setting the Terms of Battle

The start of the Japanese offensive caught the British off stride. Although Slim had correctly anticipated the Japanese basic plan of attack he failed to recognize that the attack on 6 March was in fact the start of the Japanese offensive. As a result Slim's plan to withdraw forces in good order to the chosen place of battle was thwarted by the premature Japanese attack. The Japanese had picked the time and initially the place of battle and were setting the terms of battle. The British were forced to react to the Japanese instead of conforming to their own operational plan. The British had temporarily lost some degree of their freedom of action.

Slim's failure to begin the retreat of outlying divisions before the beginning of the Japanese Offensive prevented him from executing his overall

plan as he had initially intended. Slim did not recognize the offensive as starting partly because he had predicted the start date as 15 March; this was nearly correct for the northern push but failed to consider that the Japanese would sequence their attacks, starting in the south. Slim's hope to begin with the initiative was thwarted as a result of not anticipating correctly the enemy's actions. If Slim had begun his retreat of outlying divisions in a timely manner to their initial desired battle positions he could have begun the campaign with the initiative on his side. Slim was right--even a withdrawal can be a means of retaining the initiative if it serves the commander's operational purpose. Unfortunately, the Japanese did not wait for the British.

The plight of the 17th Division had cascading effect as it caused the premature commitment of the corps reserve for a purpose which was not the destruction of enemy forces but the rescuing of friendly forces. The enemy had caused early commitment of British reserves furthering limiting friendly freedom of action. The decision to concentrate the IV corps around Imphal to fight as a corps had been the correct one, but the attacker was able to pick when and where he would fight before the withdrawal of the 17th could take place. As Slim stated: "The essence of all military planning is timing." (45) Clearly the enemy had begun the fight on his terms because it had not been possible immediately to ascertain the Japanese intentions until it was too late to execute the intended plan of battle.

In the north the Japanese were able to mass more forces at greater speed than Slim had anticipated. Once again the attacker was calling the shots. All of the Japanese 31st Division threatened Kohima and Dimapur without regard for the British plan to fight at Imphal. The Japanese had freedom of action and the British plan had not made provisions for such a contingency. The

whole British plan threatened to come unglued if means were not found to deal with the threat to Kohima and Dimapur without jeopardizing the whole Imphal battle plan. Slim's plan of defense had not adequately considered the worst case scenario which had unfolded. At this point in the battle the Japanese operational plan was clearly setting all the terms of battle.

Fortunately, Slim's preparations for the ensuing campaign had anticipated if not the actual circumstances that now faced him, at least the need for rapid reinforcement of the Imphal-Kohima forces. Key to the defense of the Imphal plain were the two all-weather airfields at Pael and Imphal. Slim knew that as long as he held these airfields he could provide the air support and supply to the forces in the Imphal plain even if the LOC's were cut by the Japanese. These same airfields would also allow him to reinforce. Although things had begun badly the enemy still conformed to Slim's plan for a decisive battle around Imphal. However, the Japanese 31st Division threatened to make it irrelevant. If they were successful in reaching Dimapur the whole plan would unravel. What Slim had to do was salvage the situation without abandoning his operational purpose of a decisive battle at Imphal.

Changing the Terms of Battle

So far the Japanese had set most of the terms of battle. It was now up to Slim to change the terms of battle by exercising initiative. The conditions for accomplishing this had already been laid when Slim had made arrangements for troop reinforcement prior to the Japanese offensive. The agility offered by the Troop Carrier Command and prior planning were tested closely. To change the terms of battle at Kohima in his favor Slim had to mass forces quickly to correct the correlation of forces at the point of attack. The Japanese had established the time and place of battle so Slim had to work on

forces and hope to gain control of the tempo through the rapid introduction of forces. On 15 April the besieged garrison at Kohima was relieved by 33rd Corps reinforcements and the tide had turned. From that point forward the Japanese no longer had the correlation of forces or reserves to control the tempo of the battle.

Slim's coolness and refusal to panic when his plan first appeared to come unraveled was essential to the eventual success of the campaign. His decision not to abandon the plan just because the Japanese were not cooperating was correct. He did not allow the Japanese initial success to sway him from his larger operational purpose--the destruction of the Japanese 15th Army. Slim knew that although the initiative was initially with the Japanese, they would have to win quickly before British airpower, superior agility, and the British defensive advantage began to turn the tide. He knew also that with the coming of the monsoon the Japanese LOC's would not hold up. As the battle progressed the Japanese' loss of time and soldiers greatly exceeded their three week estimate of the operation. Slowly the balance of the initiative tilted to Slim, as the correlation of forces and the tempo of combat was determined more and more by the British.

Slim's decision to fight a defensive battle on the Imphal plain instead of meeting the Japanese at the Chindwin River or preempting their offensive with one of his own was the correct decision. Having the initiative from the outset is only useful if you can retain it throughout the campaign. Allowing the Japanese to spring their offensive forfeited some if not all the terms of battle initially. This was not a critical factor as long as the operational plan was designed such that the initiative would in the course of the battle pass back to the defender. To finish with the initiative in your possession

is the critical point.

Slim understood what was important; ". . . the chance to destroy the enemy's forces. That done, territory could easily be reoccupied." (46) Slim knew that the best way to gain the initiative in the war was to defeat the 15th Army and the best way to do that was to draw them in upon himself.

In war it is all-important to gain and retain the initiative, to make the enemy conform to your action, to dance to your tune. When you are advancing, this normally follows; if you withdraw, it is neither so obvious nor so easy. Yet it is possible. (47)

The battle of Imphal-Kohima changed the terms of battle and allowed the balance of initiative to shift to the British. This in turn set the stage for the destruction of the Japanese 15th division.

In the end Slim was successful because he never lost sight of what his objective was--the destruction of enemy forces, not merely preventing enemy success.

Conclusions

The question of whether it is possible to have initiative on the operational defense began with the definition of initiative itself. It was stated that "initiative" is the setting or changing of the terms of battle by action to force the enemy to conform to our operational purpose and tempo while retaining our own freedom of action. Further, the terms of battle--time, place, forces and tempo--have been described to give greater utility to the definition of initiative. There may be and probably are other terms of battle, but these four serve to guide the operational commander in his quest to develop ways to seize or retain initiative at the operational level.

The study of Wellington's campaign in Portugal and Slim's campaign in Burma lend some insights on the role of initiative in the operational defense. While the possession of the initiative is normally the domain of the offense, both campaigns in this study indicate that the defender can fight with initiative to varying degrees. In addition, the counterattack is not the only means of displaying initiative when on the operational defense.

Wellington's exploits in Portugal indicate that under the right circumstances the defender at the operational level can have the initiative, even from the start. Throughout the campaign in Portugal Wellington set most or all the terms of battle and retained the initiative throughout while on the defense. However, it is important to point out the special conditions which may have allowed him to retain the initiative. The geography of Portugal together with extensive defensive works allowed Wellington severely to limit the maneuver of his opponent, thereby nullifying the advantage of the offense

to pick the point of attack. Additionally, Wellington was willing and able to forfeit friendly territory to the invader and practice a scorched earth policy. And finally, he had secure LOC's by virtue of the British Royal Navy and was not constrained by time. Had Wellington fought without these conditions it may not have been possible to retain the initiative to the extent that he did. However, it is clear that under the right circumstances and given the proper decisions, some or all aspects of initiative can be retained in the defense.

Both historical examples analyzed reflect operational commanders that chose to go on the defensive. This in it itself reflects a certain freedom of action that is not always present. Many times, if not most, commanders are in a defensive posture by virtue of the military circumstances which force them to accept rather than choose this posture. Military and political constraints as well as the enemy's actions could force a defensive posture which would otherwise have been inadvisable in the absence of those factors. This distinction could affect the ability to exercise operational initiative.

Clausewitz stated that the defense should only be used when we are too weak to pursue a positive object. However, it may warrant consideration to envision the use of the defense even when strength would allow offensive action. If the use of the operational defense under these circumstances allows the accomplishment of the aim it may represent a wiser choice than the offensive. In the early part of 1811 Wellington's strength finally exceeded that of Massena's, but Wellington still remained on the defensive. He knew that time was his ally and that the French forces were getting weaker every day while his strength was growing. Remaining on the defensive was improving his terms of battle because Massena's only chance of victory was to draw

Wellington to the strong French defensive positions and defeat his army before his own army disintegrated or was forced to retreat. Slim was strong enough to contemplate offensive action against the Japanese but knew that the advantages of a defensive course of action outweighed the advantages of the offensive in the given circumstances. Because he understood the enemy mentality he felt he could choose his place of battle even while on the defense and benefit from the advantages of the stronger form of war. In the final analysis he was right, but even so he needed an operational error by the Japanese to assure his success.

Mao Tse Tung stated: ". . . refusal to retreat and hasty acceptance of battle may appear a serious effort to gain the initiative, while in reality it is passive." (48) Both Wellington and Slim understood that initiative was not synonymous with offensive action. They both designed their defensive campaigns to draw their enemy past their culmination points so they could then be systematically defeated. In both cases the purpose of the defense was eventually to destroy the enemy forces, not just prevent enemy success. Slim's campaign demonstrated how difficult it is to have the initiative from the very start when on the defensive, since normally the attacker picks the place and time of battle. Slim's Imphal-Kohima campaign also clearly indicated that the operational defense can be used to change the terms of battle and wrest the operational initiative from the enemy.

The counterattack is not the only means of exercising initiative as the defender. The ability to shift forces rapidly to change the correlation of forces can deny the enemy his operational purpose and disrupt his tempo. The success of Slim's campaign clearly pointed out the importance of agility. The greater the agility of the force the easier it becomes for the operational

commander to set the terms of battle and thus exercise initiative.

It appears from the study of these campaigns that the ability to anticipate the enemy's actions or likely courses of action greatly enhances the ability to fight with initiative. Wellington anticipated the French actions and was always prepared to deal with any threat they could present. Slim had anticipated the need for air resupply and reinforcement but lost the initiative when he failed to anticipate properly the speed and objectives of the initial Japanese attack. The ability to anticipate properly is of course a function of how well the commander's intelligence system operates.

In general those measures which will give the force greater freedom of action irrespective of enemy actions are conducive to improving the degree of initiative the force will be able to exercise. Initiative is enhanced as a result of the creativity of commanders and staff, finding more effective ways and means of using troops and weapons, and using ways and means of conducting combat unknown to the enemy. (49)

Both Wellington and Slim believed they could retain the initiative and still fight a defensive battle. They both successfully did to varying degrees as has been discussed. The operational defense should be given greater consideration as an effective means of destroying the enemy army. In addition the use of the operational defense should not be discounted as a way to gain or maintain the initiative.

If commanders are to plan and conduct all operations according to the Army's operational concept, then they should never yield the initiative merely because they take up a defense posture. Attributing initiative to the attacking commander merely by definition is inconsistent with the Army's operational concept. (50)

Although initiative largely remains the domain of the offensive it is not solely a function of the offense. Gaining or retaining the initiative while on the defensive will probably always be more difficult to achieve. The reward for those operational commanders who can recognize the opportunities for initiative in defense and take advantage of them remains great.

End Notes

1. Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 100-5, Operations (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), p. 14.
2. Major David J. Oberst, "Three Kinds of Initiative: The Role of Initiative in AirLand Battle Doctrine," 15 May 1986, p. 35.
3. Ibid., p. 12.
4. Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 100-5, p. 15.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Major David J. Oberst, "Three Kinds of Initiative: The Role of Initiative in AirLand Battle Doctrine," SAMS Monograph, 15 May 1986, p. 13.
8. Major General I. B. Holley, Jr., "Concepts, Doctrines, Principles: Are you sure you understand these terms?", Air University Review, (Jun-Jul, 1984), p. 93.
9. FM 100-5, p. 15.
10. Oberst, op.cit., p. 12 & 35.
11. Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 100-5, 20 August 1982, p. 2-2.
12. Mao Tse Tung, Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse Tung (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), p. 159.
13. Swalm, Major Gen(USAF) Thomas S., "AirLand Battle Doctrine and the C³CM Strategy," Air Land Bulletin (TAC-TRADOC ALFA, bulletin # 86-4, 31 December 1986), p. 7.
14. Mao Tse Tung, op.cit., p. 161.
15. Oberst, op.cit., p. 5 & 6.
16. Clausewitz, Carl von, On War, Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 357
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 392.
20. Ibid., p. 357

21. FM 100-5, 1986, p. 129.
22. Ibid.
23. Marshall-Cornwall, James. Marshal Massena, London, New York, Oxford University Press, 1965. p. 179.
24. Ibid., p. 190.
25. Ibid., p. 193
26. It had always been Napoleon's principle that his soldiers should live off the invaded territories. By waiting till September the peasants would have harvested the year's crop providing a ready source for the invading army.
27. Marshall-Cornwall, op.cit., p. 210.
28. Ibid., p. 217.
29. The system of fortifications consisted of chains of mutually supporting redoubts, 152 in all, crowning every dominant tactical feature along the defensive line and enfilading all approach roads and defiles. Rivers and brooks were dammed to form lagoons and marshes; roads were blocked with abattis; bridges and culverts were prepared for demolition; forward slopes artificially scarped, and fields of fire cleared. Colonel Fletcher, Wellington's Royal engineer, had accomplished this task over the past 11 months, employing up to 10,000 local laborers. Source--Charles Oman, A History of the Peninsular War, vol. III, (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1908), p. 161.
30. Mao Tse Tung, op.cit., p. 120.
31. Charles Oman, A History of the Peninsular War, vol. III, (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1908), p. 161.
32. Marshall-Cornwall, op.cit., p. 35.
33. Cyril Falls, The Nature of Modern Warfare, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 42.
34. Stilwell's NCAC consisted of two Chinese divisions engaged in combat in the Hukawng Valley of northern Burma. Stilwell had agreed to serve as a corps commander under General Slim. With ground communications to China severed, the Americans, under Stilwell's direction as commanding general of the CBI Theater, began a long-range supply airlift from bases in northeastern India (Assam) to Kunming.

35. Sir William Slim, Defeat Into Victory, (Cassell and Company LTD, London, 1956), p. 286.
36. Louis Allen, Burma: The Longest War 1941-45, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1984), Appendix 3, p. 654. The Japanese division varied greatly in strength, between 12,000 and 22,000; its infantry, three regiments strong. The strength of a Japanese infantry regiment was 2,600; each regiment having three battalions. The Japanese regiment was the equivalent of a British brigade.
37. Slim, op.cit., p. 290-291.
38. Ibid., p. 305.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., p. 311.
41. Ibid., p. 332.
42. Ibid., p. 346.
43. Ibid., p. 292.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid. p. 294
46. Ibid. p. 292
47. Ibid.
48. Mao Tse Tung, op.cit., p. 132
49. The Soviet Art of War, Edited by Harriet Scott and William Scott, (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1982), p. 277.
50. Major James Dubik, "FM 100-5--Comparing the Operational Concept and the Defense," Military Review, December 1982, p. 15.

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